

C U R R E N T D E V E L O P M E N T S I N T H E E A S T E R N

E U R O P E A N C H U R C H E S

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Introduction

Is there any reason why the seventh number of "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches" (No. 3, 1960) should contain so much information about atheist propaganda in the USSR?

Our reports deal with the main currents of religious life in the countries of Eastern Europe, and also with the opposing trend of atheism, especially in the Soviet Union.

Without exaggerating the impact of the atheist movement, it is nevertheless essential to illustrate the nature and methods of contemporary atheist propaganda as fully as possible. For it would be a mistake to ignore atheism as a factor in contemporary history.

The treatment of a subject like "God and Satan" from the viewpoint of atheism, and other similar expressions of militant atheism, help to give an impression of the cultural environment in which Christians are living from day to day in Eastern Europe.

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C H U R C H N E W S: U.S.S.R.

A New Church Periodical

In addition to the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" which has appeared regularly every month since 1943, another periodical is now being published by the same Church.

For the first time for many years the Russian Orthodox Church has now again a periodical dealing exclusively with theological matters.

The first issue of the new year book "Bogoslovskie Trudy" (Theological Research Work) has just been printed.

"With the blessing of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Russia, Alexius, the editorial board of the Moscow Patriarchate thus renews the tradition of the periodical publication of theological writings of Russian Orthodox theologians. They will be published year by year in the form of theological symposiums", declares the editorial board in its introduction to the first number of the new publication. "The aim of the new year book is to expose to the general religious reader all the richness of Orthodoxy, to inform the theologians of our Orthodox sister churches and other Christian confessions about the achievements of our Russian Orthodox thinking, thus helping to broaden the horizon of our theological students in our church as well as of the clergy ... in order to further the creative theological research of the Russian Church."

The new year book will deal with questions of dogmatics, moral theology, church history, liturgy, patrology, church arts and other problems connected with the life of the Russian Orthodox Church and the requirements of the Christian conscience.

The first theological year book of the Russian Orthodox includes articles by Prof. N. Uspensky on the Orthodox liturgy (particularly evensong), and by Protopriest Vitaly Borovoy on the "Collectio Avellana" as a historical source concerning the relations between East and West at the end of the 15th and the beginnings of the 16th centuries.

Other articles deal with the history and the problems of the Old Catholic Church. Hieromonk Paul Tsheremukhin describes the ecumenical sobor (assembly) which was held in 1157 in Constantinople.

The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate

For the very first time since its inception, the 5th number (1960) of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" published two poems which came out last Easter. The first is called "Christ is risen". The second is dedicated to the women whose loyalty led them to the tomb of Christ, and who - finding it empty - were the first to bring the news of his resurrection.

Themes for Theological Dissertations at the
Theological Academy, Moscow

"Since 1949 the graduates from the Theological Academy at Moscow have written dissertations on the essential questions of Theology" (Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate, No. 4, 1960). The following dissertations have been written on the Old Testament:

- 1) "The divine inspiration of the sacred books of the Old Testament";
- 2) "The messianic promise contained in the Book of Genesis";
- 3) "The teaching of the Old Testament concerning the immortality of the human soul";
- 4) "The teaching of the Old Testament concerning the Priesthood".

The "Journal" comments as follows:

"This dissertation explains the basic task of the priesthood in the Old Testament, i.e. educating the Jewish people to observe the external commandments concerning purification and a just and upright way of life in a spirit of national-theocracy; this created the human material which was to receive the (awaited) Messiah."

With regard to the New Testament, one of the dissertations is entitled, "The testimony of Saint Paul concerning the mission committed to him by God" ("Saul who became Saint Paul, and argued successfully with the theologians of different trends who criticised him");

"The Eschatology of Saint Paul, according to the first Epistle to the Corinthians" (based on the analysis of the interpretation of the Early Fathers with a description of the Dogma of the Resurrection of the Dead);

"The sinfulness of the human race, according to the teaching of the Apostle Paul";

"Servitude to the Law, and the freedom bestowed by the Gospel, according to the teaching of Saint Paul", etc.

The "Journal" comments: "These dissertations are of particular importance because the students who wrote them had to make an independent study of the main source of Christian belief - the books of the Old and New Testament."

The theses on dogmatic theology deal with the following subjects:

- 1) "The dogma of the Redemption in Russian theological literature during the past 50 years";
- 2) "The teaching concerning Salvation based on the Messkanon (Triodion) of Lent and Passion Week and of the Choral Book (Oktoikha)".

The "Journal" comments: "The worship-service, which is the very heart of the life of the Church, is a true reflection of the Orthodox teaching concerning redemption. The worship-service is the expression of Orthodox theology to the congregation, the unfailing, living creed of the Orthodox Church throughout its long history. The worship-service is the proclamation of God's message to the Church as a whole."

- 3) "The doctrine of Grace according to the writings of Bishop Theophan the Hermit".

The "Journal" comments:

"The whole Church on earth is transfigured by the fulness of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. The influence of this Grace can only be understood by those who have experienced its redeeming power. One of the people who experienced it was Theophanos, the Hermit, who was familiar with the writings of the Early Fathers."

4) "The doctrine of the Redemption according to the Holy Fathers Athanasius, Basil and Gregory."

The "Journal" comments:

"After overcoming sin through suffering and dying on the Cross, through his glorious Resurrection Our Saviour not only restored human nature to its original purity; he also made it divine (Obozhil)."

5) "The teaching of the Early Fathers concerning the Sacraments during the first and second centuries".

The "Journal" comments:

"This question is particularly acute today, because nearly all the Protestant groups are concerned about it. The author of this dissertation proves convincingly that the writings of the Early Fathers in the first two centuries give us every reason to assume that the Early Church recognised the seven Sacraments.

"The value of these dissertations on questions of dogmatic theology consists in the fact that 'the students not only had to analyse their source-material, but also to make a thorough enquiry into the works of Russian theologians.' Another important point is 'that the disclosure of the doctrine of salvation based on the order of worship is actually based on definite documentation, which has seldom been done before.'

"In the sphere of ethics a number of dissertations were written, which are important because 'the Theological Academy is called today primarily to train men to practise pastoral care, and it is extremely important both for the clergy and for the members of the congregation to realise the separate factors in the ethical development of the individual Christian, his failures, and the way to overcome his sinful passions.' Here again the ethics of the Early Fathers are extremely important."

The subjects dealt with include:

"The teaching of the Early Fathers concerning the passions and how to overcome them."

"The teaching of the Early Fathers concerning the human mind, soul and body with a view to their ethical perfection."

"The sacred venture of atonement (Podvig Pokoiania) as a means towards the religious and ethical growth of Christians."

"Analysis of the constant growth of sin and its forms of expression."

Dissertations on patrology:

"The dogmatic and ethical teaching of St. Irenäus of Lyons" and so on.

Questions of the liturgy are also subject to careful study, so are the history of the church, the history of the Russian Church and the history of the churches in the countries bordering on Russia. Among these is a thesis on "The History of the Orthodox Church in Latvia up to the 19th Century", which draws attention to the fact that the Christian faith was brought to Latvia from Russia. (The preaching was peaceful in character and Eastern Orthodoxy spread, without any compulsion being exercised among the population). During the centuries when Latvia was under the rule of the Teutonic Knights and of Poland and Sweden, the Orthodox faith grew weaker; but it became stronger again in the 19th century.

Other theses deal with "The Orthodox Church among the Tshuvashen" (a Finnish tribe in East Russia), in the Ukraine, in White Russia (Bielorussia) the bulwark of the Orthodox faith; with the struggle of Russian Orthodoxy against the Roman Catholic Uniate Church in Carpathian Russia in the 20th century, and "the liquidation of the Union in 1949."

"Relations between the Russian and Bulgarian Churches."

"The Patriarchate of Antioch and its relations to the Russian Orthodox Church after the fall of Constantinople."

There are also dissertations on the Early Christian Church, the importance of martyrdom in the first three centuries, the relation of the Graeco-Roman world to Christianity based on the works of apologetists of the first three centuries, and so on.

One dissertation deals with "Russian Orthodox society and its scientific-cultural activities in the Near East", pointing out that "this Russian Orthodox mission had no political purpose."

With regard to pastoral theology the following themes were examined:

"The priestly office according to St. Tikhon of Zagorsk", "Pastoral care according to St. John Chrysostom", etc. The thorough study of the teaching of the Early Fathers has helped future pastors to realise their responsibility for exercising spiritual care.

Some of the students dealt with questions of basic theology:

"The Christian teaching about the destiny of man";
"The Christian belief in miracles";
"The theological bases for the truth concerning the creation of the World";
"Education of humanity for Christianity".

Other theses deal with Christian archaeology and church art. In the field of Canon Law dissertations were written on:

"The legal relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Byzantine Church from the introduction of Christianity into Russia until the fall of Constantinople";
"The Orthodox Doctrine of Autocephaly".

Several dissertations are also devoted to homiletical questions.

The article in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" concludes by saying "that the students had drawn their material mainly from the Bible, as the main source of religious-theological knowledge, and also from the writings of the Early Fathers and of Russian theologians, especially in the sphere of dogmatics, ethics, pastoral theology and patrology, which gives cause for rejoicing."

The Defence of World Peace

His Holiness Alexius, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia gave an address at the latest "Meeting of the Soviet People in favour of Disarmament", the text of which is printed in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate", No. 3, 1960. This statement has not yet been published elsewhere. It reads as follows:

"I am the mouthpiece of the Russian Orthodox Church, to which millions of Orthodox Christians belong, citizens of our state. They send you their greetings and their best wishes.

"As history testifies, our Church is the same Church which helped to establish the state-order in Russia when it first became an independent country; through Christian teaching it strengthened the moral basis of the family, insisted on the rights of women as citizens, condemned usury and slavery, trained people to have a sense of duty and responsibility, and constantly filled the gaps in the state legislation.

"Our Church is the same Church which built the wonderful monuments which have enriched Russian culture, and of which our people are still extremely proud today.

"It is the same Church which helped to unite Russia when our country was divided into separate princedoms, and asserted the importance of Moscow as the sole centre of Church and Government.

"It is the same Church which, during the years of suffering under the Tartar yoke, urged the Khan of the Golden Horde to make peace, and thus protected the Russian people against further invasion and further devastation.

"At that time the Russian Orthodox Church, our Church, strengthened the spirit of the people by its faith in the coming liberation, and by maintaining the people's sense of national dignity and moral strength.

"The Church supported the Russian state in its struggle against the foreign aggressors during the years of 'confusion' (Smutnoe Vremia) and during the national war of 1812. And during the last world war it was this Church which stood by the Russian people, and contributed its utmost to help in achieving victory and peace.

"This means that our Church is the same Russian Orthodox Church which has worked to promote the moral development of our people for centuries, and which has also helped in the past to strengthen the Russian state.

"After the second world war, in 1948, this Church of ours sent out an appeal in collaboration with its sister-churches in other countries to Christians all over the world, urging them to resist any attempt to infringe peace. It was this Church of ours too which was represented by Metropolitan Nikolai in 1945 at all the national and international congresses of the Peace Movement.

"As is well known, in Paris, Stockholm, Berlin and Warsaw, Vienna and Helsinki, Prague and Ceylon, public opinion all over the world has listened with particular attention to the voice of the Russian Orthodox Church, whose attitude to the great questions of our time has always set an example to the other Christian churches and religious organisations.

"The agreements, statements and appeals made by the Russian Orthodox Church during the past eleven years, which have been reported in the international, church and foreign newspapers, all testify how much our Church has done to unite Christians of all countries in the common struggle against the danger of another world war.

"Today also, in representing the Russian Orthodox Church here our purpose is to express its full support for the peaceful efforts of our people, and to help to eliminate any pretexts or reasons which might lead to another armed conflict. For we, in the Church, regard war as a brutal and criminal distortion of our Christian faith entirely contrary to the commandment of all-forgiving love which our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ has bequeathed to us.

"By its condemnation of all disputes, all hostility, all hatred between the nations, our Church once again urges the reduction of armaments. It blesses the attempts being made to abolish all weapons, for the use of armed force is absolutely contrary to the spirit of Christianity which is the religion of gentleness, love and mercy; it is an attack on the very name of God which - in the words of the holy Evangelist Saint John - is love. (I John 4: 16)

"The faith of the Russian Orthodox Church is still unshaken, and it still supports the efforts of the Soviet Government to bring about total disarmament, with undiminished enthusiasm. It appreciates the importance of the law recently passed, reducing the numbers in the armed forces in the USSR, as a convincing proof of the peaceful intentions of the Russian people.

"In the discussion about full disarmament, we Christians are particularly gladdened by the appeal to all nations of the world to 'beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks'. These words, which express the basic conviction of Christians about war, were spoken by the Prophet Isaiah whom we Christians call 'the Evangelist of the Old Testament' because he prophesied the birth of the Saviour of the world, long before it occurred.

"Thus the Bible - this collection of the sacred books of the Christian Church - is shown to be the original source of the idea of peace, which today, in view of the lethal nature of modern weapons, must be recognised as the most crucial problem confronting the human race.

"The Church of Christ is exposed to persecution and contumely; nevertheless it still pursues the good of humanity, and does its duty by advocating peace and brotherly love.

"This attitude on the part of the Church contains much consolation for believers; for what do all the efforts of human reason amount to in comparison with Christianity? Its 2,000 years of history speak for themselves. Christ himself foresaw the hostile attacks which would be directed against the Church, and promised it that the gates of hell should not prevail against it.

"We Christians know how we have to live in order to serve mankind. And our love to men can never grow less.

"That is why all people of goodwill, irrespective of their faith or their convictions, can be convinced that in the struggle for full disarmament the Russian Orthodox Church is one of their most loyal allies, and that it will also support everything undertaken by its motherland Russia.

"From its centuries of experience our Church can say that if we all contribute healthy ideas, sound feelings, efforts based on goodwill and right action to international life, we shall have done everything we can to establish peace among mankind and between the nations."

The Peace Work of the Christian Church

The last number (No.4) of the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" contains an article by A. Kasem-Beg dealing with the significance of the Easter Festival for peace, and the peace work of the churches.

These efforts for peace include the churches' work for rapprochement between divided Christians, and the overcoming of the fear of international war.

"Thanks to closer contact with Orthodoxy, especially with the Russian Orthodox Church, the Western world is beginning to realise more and more that all the churches and religions can learn something from the Russian Church, which for a long time has been misunderstood and unknown" ...

Attention is drawn to "the growing interest of Christian thinkers and theologians in the eucharistic life of the Russian Church and in the questions of doxology which they have discovered in the Orthodox liturgy." ...

It goes on to say: "As is well known, the Roman Catholic Church is preparing for its Sobor (Church Council). All sorts of opinions about it have appeared in the press. But a statement by Pope John XXIII gives the impression that this Council will be as comprehensive as possible in character, and that the other Christian churches will be included. The difficulties in realising an initiative of this kind are obvious and need no explanation".

"But both Catholics and other Christian confessions, including Orthodox, have expressed the view that the possibility of non-Catholics attending the Vatican Council is excluded, and that they will not even be able to send observers ...

"Yet the need is clear for full discussion of the different concepts of the Christian faith, their re-examination and their agreement. One is therefore justified in expecting the Vatican Council to pronounce a fresh message about international peace and interconfessional peace, not merely by condemning war, but also by condemning everything that leads to intolerance." ...

"The ecumenical movement has achieved considerable success in promoting rapprochement between the different Christian churches. During the past decade the ecumenical movement has become the vehicle through which Christians of many confessions are striving to overcome their divisions. The World Council of Churches with its headquarters in Geneva is an advisory body, and intends to remain such, and it has already achieved impressive results.

"The World Council of Churches is becoming increasingly active in its opposition to war. It is particularly aware of the practical aspect of the problem of peace, and it enquires into all the questions connected with the maintenance and promotion of peace."

The article in the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate" also prints extracts from the statement made by the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches at Buenos Aires in February, 1960, on the subject of peace.

The article concludes by saying that the World Council of Churches "welcomes the relaxation of the tension in international affairs. But at the same time it points out that the basic causes of the mistrust have not yet been eradicated. In the opinion of the World Council of Churches the conclusion of an agreement to stop experiments with nuclear weapons ... might help actively to deepen the mutual confidence between the nations."

Excommunication of Ossipov

In December 1959 Professor Alexandre Ossipov of the Leningrad Theological Academy left the Russian Orthodox Church to join the atheist movement in the USSR (see "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches" No 1/1960). The following is an extract from the "Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate," No 2, 1960 concerning Ossipov.

Extract from Resolutions of His Holiness the Patriarch and the Holy Synod, No 23, 30 December, 1959:

"The Holy Synod at its meeting under the presidency of His Holiness the Patriarch Alexius resolved:

"To regard as expelled from Holy Orders and deprived of all churchly intercourse the former protopriest and former professor of the Leningrad Theological Academy Alexandre Ossipov, the former protopriest Paul Darmansky and the other servants of the church, as having publicly blasphemed the name of God. 'They went out from us but they were not ours'. (John 2: 19)

"To expel from the church Evgraph Duluman and the other former Orthodox laymen, as having publicly blasphemed the name of God".

New Patriarch Elected in the Orthodox Church in Georgia

G. Sh. Sidamolidse has been made Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Georgia (Grusia). The Most Holy Catholicos the Patriarch of Grusia, whose name is Ephrem II, is a close relation of some of the former leading hierarchs of the Church of Georgia, including the Patriarch Leonid and Bishops Alexandre and Pirrom (of the Okroperidse family).

The new Patriarch attended the religious school at Gori (the birthplace of Stalin) until 1912 and then entered the religious seminary at Tbilissi (capital of Georgia). He then became a monk, then a Bishop and an Archbishop, until now he has been enthroned as Patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

Ephrem II is also famous as a restorer of ancient cathedrals and abbeys, especially the beautiful cathedral at Mykhet.

The new Patriarch is the author of many religious and literary publications. Among other things he reedited the "Akafist" (Intercession) in honour of the "Iversky-Icon of the Mother of God" (at Moscow). He has also written an "Akafist" for the Georgian martyr-prince David and Constantine of Argvet. And he finished the life of the saints of the Grusian Orthodox Church which was begun by the Patriarch Leonid. His other works include a dictionary of Georgian archaisms. And thanks to the research work of the new Patriarch, many outstanding personalities and saints of the Georgian Orthodox Church have been rescued from oblivion and included in the Georgian church-calendar.

Ephrem II, Patriarch-Catholicos of the Grusian Orthodox Church, succeeds the late Patriarch Melchisedek III. During the elections for the new Patriarch a delegation was sent from the Russian Orthodox Church to Tbilissi, including the Archbishop of Lvov and Tarnopol Palladius, the Archbishop of Tschernevo and Neshinsk Andreas, and Archimandrite Nikodim (of Moscow). Archimandrite Antonius (priest of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Moscow) was also in Tbilissi for the same reason.

Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians in
Unprecedented Visit to the United States

His Holiness, Vasken I, Supreme Patriarch-Catholicos of All Armenians, made a visit to the United States on May 20.

A delegation of lay and religious leaders, headed by the Primate, and a large body of the faithful of the Armenian Church, greeted His Holiness on his arrival at Idlewild Airport. It was the first time a supreme head of the Armenian Apostolic Church has visited either North or South America.

The Catholicos, who succeeded to the throne of St. Gregory in 1955, is the spiritual leader of 4,000,000 Armenians throughout the world. In the United States His Holiness had an opportunity to become familiar with the conditions of the churches and parishes in America.

On June 5, the Catholicos celebrated the Divine Liturgy at the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. Subsequently, His Holiness paid visits to Armenian centres in Boston, Detroit, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me"
(II Tim. 1: 13)

This is the title of an article on understanding the commandments of Jesus, published in the monthly paper of the All-Unionist Association of the Evangelical Baptist Christians "Bratsky Vestnik" (Moscow, No 1, 1960). The article is by A.I. Mitzkevitch.

It begins by reminding its readers that man's body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, which he has from God (I Cor. 6: 19). It goes on to say: "Physical instruction (Fiskultura) is given regularly on the radio in our country. This forces us to consider the development of our physical strength, and to strengthen our bodies, so as to have healthy minds and bodies..."

"'Fiskultura' is given on the radio. It would therefore be good if our fellow-Christians followed these gymnastic lessons. Every Christian should undertake 'Fiskultura'. The young people in our churches must steel their bodies by gymnastics in their free time.

"It is a regrettable fact that some brethren and sisters are swept away by excessive mysticism, and are averse to any kind of physical training. They think that God is interested only in the salvation of our souls, and not in the health of our bodies. This idea is completely false, 'for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church.' (Eph. 5: 29)

"Not long ago a young brother came to me. I asked him about his religious life, and he replied that he felt quite happy about that. But when I noticed his pale face and frail body (I knew that he had a 'sedentary' occupation), I urged him to take up some form of sport. He looked at me in astonishment and answered, 'Bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.' (I Tim. 4: 8)

"I had to explain to him that in this passage the Apostle Paul was referring not to physical training but to practices which weaken the body, which people used to think were conducive to the salvation of the soul (asceticism, penitential chains, inadequate food, castigation of the body, etc.). What the Apostle is really saying in this passage is, that if one wants to be a true servant of Jesus Christ, one must have spiritual food, one must live by Christian teaching, and that for this a training which is merely physical is not helpful. (I Tim. 4: 6-12)

"Some Christians also overdid fasting; they went so far as to weaken themselves completely. "We approve of fasting under certain circumstances, as the expression of the life of prayers. But does the Bible really intend people to fast until they are completely exhausted, and to destroy the precious gift of health?"

We must be responsible members of society and responsible citizens

"As patriots we cannot help feeling proud of the great technical, scientific and cultural achievements of the USSR. We need only visit the magnificent permanent exhibition showing the economic achievements of the Soviet Union in order to be amazed at the speed with which Soviet industry and Soviet culture have expanded during the past year. Many of us can still remember the old obsolete, backward, ignorant Russia. But through the united efforts of our people, within a short time it has become one of the leading countries of the world. And it is not difficult to imagine how the standard of living in our country will go on rising, provided that peace is maintained and that our people can go on working to improve the future.

"We Christians must cooperate with our people and adopt a sensible attitude towards the common problems of our country, help to solve them, and do everything we can to promote the welfare of the Soviet people.

"The Word of God calls us to loyal, honest service: 'if a man will not work, neither let him eat' (II Thess. 3: 10). 'Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men' (Col. 3:23). 'Build ye houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat the fruit of them.' (Jer. 29: 5)"

We must welcome the cultural achievements of the nations, an' make use of them

"None of us must deny the need for education. At the services in our Church in Moscow intercession is always made for success in studies and examinations. Highly-educated servants of God like Moses and the Apostle Paul were capable of doing far more to the glory of God than uneducated people. Paul was thoroughly versed in the poetry and the literature of his time (Acts 17: 28; Titus 1: 12).

"Baptists and Evangel-Christians must make efforts to improve their general education. They must attain a high level of culture and endeavour to be well-informed on all subjects ...

"We who study the Book of Books, the Bible, must also study history, geography and other branches of knowledge. We must inform ourselves about all the technical an' scientific achievements of our time, everything that develops our intelligence an' our capacities an' which makes us into highly-developed, educated people.

"We must remember that we are living in an era of tremendous discoveries in technics and science, and that in this era Christ is speaking to the souls of men, urging them to receive his sanctifying grace. He will not only satisfy the material needs of his disciples; he will also satisfy their spiritual needs, for man does not live by bread alone (Matt. 4: 4).

"It is a regrettable fact that there are a few Christians who are averse to anything new and useful in the field of culture. They have an ingrained notion that everything earthly is sinful.

"But the Apostle Paul teaches us to 'prove all things; hold fast that which is good' (I Thess. 5: 21). He considered it as a good thing when Christians acquired culture. This is clear from what he says about his own education, which he received 'at the feet of Gamaliel', the famous teacher of his time (Acts 22: 3)."

New Latvian Translation of New Testament and Psalms

For the first time since the war the New Testament and the Psalms have been published in Latvia, with the permission of the Government, in a new Latvian translation.

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C H U R C H N E W S: BULGARIA

Tsrkoven Vestnik

"Tsrkoven Vestnik", the 61-year-old publication of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, contains a report in its 1960 number on the outstanding events in the life of the church, in addition to theological articles. The latter include an article entitled "Let us continue in the joy of our Faith".

Professor Makovsky writes on "The Prophetic Promise of the Messiah - Christ" (Isaiah 9: 6ff), stressing the two natures of Christ (divine and human). In the 9th chapter of the Book of Zechariah, verse 9, the prophet says, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass."

Professor Makovsky explains that the original Hebrew text admits another translation, namely "riding upon an ass, the foal of an ass, a draught-animal". If the text is interpreted in this way, "there can be no further doubt about its spiritual significance."

"And the Word became flesh" is the title of an article by Professor Ch. Giaurov, which deals with the theological-exegetical analysis of the concept of the "Logos". By "Logos" the Evangelist John understands the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The Early Fathers have shown us that it is the concept of the "Logos" (the Word) which gives us the right concept of the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, the Everlasting Son of God the Father; at the same time this concept makes clear the act of Our Lord Jesus Christ in descending to earth and instructing us in his divine teaching.

The article by Archimandrite Illiarion entitled "The historical aspect of the birth of Christ" produces direct and indirect historical evidence to confirm the accounts of the birth of Christ contained in the Gospels. Unfortunately the author does not always give the sources upon which he draws. For instance, he writes that King Herold lived in Rome in the house of the Pro-Consul Pollinius and that he was a contemporary of Virgil, so that the famous "Fourth Eclogue" of Virgil may have been influenced by the prophecy of the coming of the Messiah which worried Herod throughout his life.

The article on "Christmas Music for Church-Choirs" will interest everyone who appreciates church music. It is written by Dinev, a Bulgarian composer, and describes in detail the musical history of the Monastery of Pil. Before Bulgaria was liberated from the yoke of the Turks, solo-singing was customary in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. It was only after 1877 that part-singing was introduced by the choir of the church of Svitosh, which consisted of singers from a Russian regimental choir after the Russian troops had crossed the Danube. Since then part-singing has become habitual in the Bulgarian Church, except at certain services such as evensong, when unison singing is still the rule.

In the third number of "Tsrkoven Vestnik" Patriarch Cyril attacks anti-semitism. The head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church reminds his readers that already before the second world war, when he was Metropolitan of Plovdy, he publicly advocated protecting young people against anti-semitism.

"Tsrkoven Vestnik" also reports that at the end of December 1959 the priest Radko Pop Todor Todorov (the oldest professor of church law and Christian sociology in Bulgaria) defended a scientific dissertation on "The Origins of the Christian Church, its Administration in its Order in the First three Centuries after Christ" in the presence of the Patriarch and a large number of church dignitaries, professors, students and lay people. This dissertation was pronounced to be an important contribution to Bulgarian theology, and appropriate academic honours were conferred on the author.

A report on the speeches and sermons of the Patriarch Cyril by the same author (published in 1959) deals with 47 addresses by the Bulgarian Patriarch on different occasions.

In the sixth number of "Tsrkoven Vestnik" T. Sybev discusses the problem of "Truth, Love, Unity and Peace" on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the end of the Bulgarian schism. He recalls the historical statements of the Bulgarian church leaders from the 10th century to the present day. He welcomes the end of the schism, through the influence of Benjamin I, Patriarch of Constantinople (Feb. 22nd 1945) with the co-operation of Alexius, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia.

An article by I.P. Ormandjaev on "The Participation of the Exarchate of Bulgaria in the Struggle for Liberation of the Bulgarian Tenant-Farmers in the South-West Balkans" draws attention to documents which prove the role played by the Bulgarian Church in this social-economic struggle.

Another article states that this year the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is planning to enlarge its church-buildings.

C H U R C H N E W S: CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Meeting of the Presidium of the Ecumenical Council

The following report is taken from the information service of the Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia (No 6, 1960).

The presidium of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Czechoslovakia met in Prague on 27th of May, 1960 with Dr. V. Hajek in the chair. It made a statement about the attitude of the Ecumenical Council towards current home and international issues which have also a bearing on the life of Christian churches. A memorandum was sent to the World Council of Churches about the study materials for the Third Assembly (see the report of the Faith and Order Commission below). The Ecumenical Council considered the Faith and Order Commission report as well as the plan of work of the Public Life and International Questions Committee. Both are standing commissions set up by the study department of the Ecumenical Council. The Ecumenical Council intends to publish a booklet about the Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia.

Session of the Faith and Order Commission

A standing commission for the study of Faith and Order questions was formed within the framework of the Study Department of the Ecumenical Council of Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia. The member churches nominated their delegates to this commission. It met for the first time on the 26th of May. The commission is to have a double task: it is to study questions which are usually placed under this heading, but it is also to study problems which result from the encounters of the different churches in Czechoslovakia. The first task of this commission is to get thoroughly acquainted with the results of the Faith and Order Movement of the World Council of Churches. It will focus its attention especially on the work of the theological commission of the World Council of Churches (studying the order of institutions, divine service, Christ and the Church, the Church and traditions, and interconfessional conversations) and on the implications of the meetings of churches on conference platforms (the meetings in Lund, Oberlin, Evanston, and others which may take place in future). But it will devote itself also to the study of home problems by investigating the contributions to the ecumenical movement of the various Protestant churches in Czechoslovakia. The members of the Commission will study the essential contribution and the message of each member church in Czechoslovakia, so as to discover the specific features of each group. The results of these investigations will be laid before the Ecumenical Council. The plan of work of this standing commission links on to the programme of the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission but will keep in mind the specific needs of the Czechoslovak churches.

(Information Service of the Protestant Churches
in Czechoslovakia, No 6, 1960)

The Study of World Council of Churches Third Assembly Materials

The commission appointed to study the World Council of Churches Third Assembly Materials met in Prague under the chairmanship of Dr. J.L. Hromádka on the 26th of May 1960 and put forward its opinion of the above materials. The theme of the Third Assembly, "Jesus Christ - The Light of the World", is a very appropriate one, but the commission emphasized the need to work out this theme consistently (both theologically and methodically) from a Christocentric view of Unity - for which the churches strive, of witness - which they are sharing, and of Service - which they are called to perform. Thus, by riveting it to the one and only foundation, the message of the World Council of Churches would be potent and gain the penetration that is necessary if we want not only to advertise the state of the world and church in which we live, but also to seek remedy where it can be found. The commission has a feeling that the conception of Christian Unity as contained in the Assembly materials is somewhat too static. It feels there is a need for thorough exegetic analysis of some of the concepts (for example: - the world, grace, conception of history etc.). A realistic view of the world cannot be left out in the passages about service, which includes to day the question of Cold War, a fact of international life about which the churches must speak out unequivocally. The Ecumenical Council accepted the detailed report of the commission and a statement will be sent to the World Council of Churches. The commission will continue to study the Materials and will attempt a new formulation of some of the parts.

(Information Service of the Protestant Churches in Czechoslovakia, No 6, 1960)

C H U R C H N E W S: HUNGARY

The New Lutheran Book of Common Order under Preparation

Already in March, 1956, the Bishops of the Lutheran Church, who, in terms of the church constitution, are the supreme guardians of liturgical matters, gave commission to Professor Karoly Pröhle to prepare a draft for a new Book of Common Order. Now, after the work of several years, Professor Pröhle has collected the material of the new agenda. The major part of the draft, with expository notes has been published in instalments during the past eighteen months in the pastors' monthly "Lelkipaszter". To speed up the process of publication, the still outstanding material will be mimeographed, and the pastors who in this way will have access to the material will send their comments to Professor Pröhle by the end of the current year. In addition to this method of circulating the new draft, the pastors' study groups have had eight meetings to discuss the new agenda with the personal participation of Professor Pröhle. Also in the future course of the work the agenda will be prepared with the widest possible participation of the pastors, so that it will actually be the common undertaking of the entire Lutheran church, and in the most important questions, the consensus of all concerned will be obtained. It is hoped that the new agenda will be published and, with the approval of the bishops, will take effect in 1961.

The first agenda of the Lutheran Church in Hungary was published in 1932. It was the work of the Rev. Fishburn Taylor Raffay, of the existing Montana District of the Lutheran Church. Its use, however, was not obligatory, nor could it pass into general use.

(Hungarian Church Press, Vol. XII, No 11, 1960)

Bishop Zoltan Kaldy addressed the Dresden Celebrations

At the invitation of the Peace Council of the German Democratic Republic, a four-member Hungarian protestant church delegation attended the celebrations arranged to mark the end of World War II and the liberation of the German people. The Hungarian delegates also visited the towns in which Luther lived, several cultural institutes and inspected some significant accomplishments in the process of rebuilding the German Democratic Republic. At the Dresden celebrations, May 9 - 11, where the Hungarian delegates appeared with the church leaders of 15 countries, Bishop Zoltan Kaldy who, as the leader of the Hungarian delegation, was seated with the presidium, addressed the meeting in the name of the Hungarian delegation.

The Bishop in his address reminded the audience of the destruction and the victims of the two world wars. He referred to the heinous crimes of fascism and declared that, in the atomic age, the Christian churches must protest with an ever-growing determination against the danger of war which threatens the very existence of humanity, and must stand out for the solving of the existing differences by peaceful negotiations. He continued: "We must say plainly that war is sin. It is against the will of God. We must witness to the truth that God created the world for peace, so that men may work in harmony with each other, may advance and praise their Lord and Creator in peace.

"We must, therefore, definitely reject the view of the American theologian who has made the following statement: 'We must undertake the specific sin which lies in retaining nuclear weapons as the temporary guarantee of peace and an instrument of deterrence'. We must say plainly that there can be no end whatever that could justify the instruments of mass destruction.

"It is very sad that the churches throughout the world cannot as yet take a fully unanimous stand for scrapping atomic weapons and banning war.

"The church must undertake this service primarily with its own specific means. It must proclaim the saving Gospel and Law of God. But, beyond this it must join hands with Christians and non-Christians for the survival of the world. The peace of the world is such a vital issue that in its interests, all ideological conflicts must be pushed into the background and with liberated hearts, we must cooperate with all those who strive to save the world from a fatal catastrophe".

(Hungarian Church Press, Vol. XII, No 11, 1960)

"We are conscious to be at one with the forces struggling for the good of the Hungarian people and the welfare of humanity".

On the 27th and 28th of May the second National Congress of the Patriotic People's Front was held at Budapest. (The Patriotic People's Front is the most comprehensive social mass organisation in Hungary. It continues and develops the traditions of that popular front movement before World War II.) Among the 800 delegates of the local People's Front organisations and several hundred invited persons a number of pastors and church leaders were also present as delegates of the county and town committees of the People's Front.

Minister of State Gyula Kallai, first deputy of the president of the government, president of the National Council of the Patriotic People's Front, presented his report in which, among other themes, he also spoke about the connections of the churches with the state an' the work of social construction. "In the work of building up the rich and prosperous socialist Hungary believers an' non-believers equally participate", said the president. "This is the foundation for the possibilities of cooperation between the state and the churches. The churches, too, take part in the fight for the defence of peace. We are of the opinion that a churchman who takes part in this fight does not alienate himself from his church, but moves nearer to the people, to the country of the working people". The president greeted with love the churchmen who were present at the congress and all those participating in carrying out the great national tasks.

In reply to the foregoing statements in the president's report Bishop Dr. Tibor Bartha, Ministerial President of the General Synod of the Reformed Church, President of the Ecumenical Council of Churches in Hungary, rose to speak in the name of the Protestant churches. Bishop Bartha was attending the congress as the 'delegate of' Hajdu-Bihar County (the vicinity of Debrecen) which has a predominantly Reformed population.

"The decisive majority of the pastors, the multitude of our believers", said the Bishop, "line up with confidence to follow the leaders of the Hungarian people and regard it as an honour that they may take part in the endeavours for the welfare of the Hungarian people, and, at the same time, for the good of humanity, and for peace. It has been on the ground of the facts of life that we have recognized the ethical value an' deep humanness of the endeavours of socialism, the fact that socialism means a more human form of life for the Hungarian people, reconciliation and brotherhood for the peoples of the Danube basin, and a peaceful future for mankind. We are conscious of being at one with the forces struggling for the soul of the Hungarian people an' the welfare of humanity".

When the Protestant churches - albeit in view of the obvious ideological differences - support the system which (for the first time in the history of the Hungarian people) has liquidated unemployment and has given free medical care, medicine and right to hospitalisation, sickness allowance and pensions to more than 80% of the population, more humane working conditions and an old age more worthy of human dignity to the millions of our peasants, then they have got nearer not only to the cause of the people, the working men, but also to their own statements of creed. "We have recognized - said the Bishop - that the One Who taught us the Parable of the Good Samaritan does not ask for ideological considerations, when it is a matter of serving life, but for unconditional love. We have also got nearer to our own historic traditions. Under the shadow of an attempted medieval restoration in 1956 Calvinist an' Lutheran pastors realized that - as so often in the course of centuries past - it was the life and future of the Hungarian people together with our Reformation inheritance that was at stake".

(Hungarian Church Press, Vol. XII, No 12, 1960)

C H U R C H N E W S : Y U G O S L A V I A

Patriarch German Enthroned

Patriarch German, who was elected as head of the Serbian Orthodox Church with its eight million members two years ago, was recently officially enthroned in the old Patriarchate Church at Pec. The ceremony was attended by many outstanding dignitaries of Church and State. It was conducted by the four oldest Archbishops of the Serbian Church, and started with an impressive service taken by 17 bishops and several priests.

In the Middle Ages and until 1766 Pec was the seat of the Serbian Patriarch; it is still an important centre of church life. After 1766 the Patriarchate was moved to Sremski Karlovci and in 1918, when Yugoslavia became an independent state, it was transferred to the capital, Belgrade.

Yugoslav Government Confers High Honour on Patriarch

In recognition of his services in "deepening the peaceful cooperation and friendly relations" between Yugoslavia and other countries, the Yugoslav Government has conferred the Banner of Yugoslavia (first class) on the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch German.

The Order was conferred at an official ceremony at Borba, attended by many important dignitaries of State and Church. In his closing speech Dobriovoj Radosavljevic, the Cabinet Minister responsible for church affairs, stressed the fact that a number of important questions had been successfully settled between church and state, and that in future the church could count upon the help and cooperation of the state.

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A T H E I S T P R O P A G A N D A I N T H E U . S . S . R .

Religious-traditional survivals and how to eradicate them

"Soviet life has undoubtedly condemned what remains of religious thought to extinction", writes "The Communist", the Moscow organ of the Communist Party (No 8, 1960). "But it cannot be maintained that this progressive process (the extinction of religion) is taking place automatically. The choice of the best ways and means of eradicating the vestiges which still remain depends upon realising the form these religious ideas take, the classes in which they still survive, and what has helped to prolong their existence."

The Academy of Sciences sent out a questionnaire (through the Ethnographical Institute - N.N. Miklukho-Maklay) in four districts of Central Russia in 1959, to discover the reasons why religion is still practised in the USSR. The results have not yet been published. But in a preliminary notice referring to this forthcoming report, "The Communist" summarises the work of this enquiry as follows. (the sub-titles have been added by the editor of "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches" in order to make the report clearer).

The spread of atheism in the country districts

"In the villages a considerable number of the workers on the collective farms (Kolchose) are atheists. There are whole villages whose inhabitants are completely free from religious influences". Example: the members of the Lenin Kolchose in the Kalinin-Oblast.

The same applies to many other places. The tendency to eradicate religion is a characteristic feature of our Soviet village life. It expresses itself in the struggle against the religious ideas which still exist. For "in the Kolchose there are still quite a number of believers, although - under the influence of public life and of anti-religious propaganda - they are beginning to have doubts about the truth of their faith, and are finally coming over to atheism."

The difference between believers today and in the past

"Believers today differ from those before the Revolution, when religious ideas were closely bound up with reactionary political concepts ... and were made use of to serve the interests of the exploiting classes. In the Soviet Union a sharp division has developed between religion (which still retains its reactionary character) and the progressive political views of the overwhelming majority of believers. In Socialist society the mass of believers are patriots of their Socialist motherland and play an active part in building up Socialist-Communism.

The faith of Soviet people is very different today from what it used to be in the past. Even those who are Christians have a very vague notion today about Christian dogmatics or about the system of Christian doctrine as a whole. Even in the older generation fewer and fewer people really understand Christian doctrine.

One woman-worker on a Kolchose, "R", (aged 50) in the village of Ryshkovo (Gorko-Oblast) says, "Prayer exists for earthly matters ... A child falls ill, or a man fails to return home from the war, and then prayer is good". This purely utilitarian concept of religion is typical of the great majority of Christians.

Under the Soviet regime that part of religious worship has lost its importance which was an organic part of the canonical order of Orthodoxy, and in which (according to the church) the faith of the individual should find personal expression. Today Christians no longer pray every day, nor do they attend the services regularly, nor observe the customs appointed by the church (communion, confession, etc.). "My daughter has to get up early in the mornings to milk the cows; how can she find time to say prayers?" says a woman who works on a Kolchose in the village of Zinovievo.

"Of course, the point is not merely that people have no time", comments "The Communist". The real point is that people are losing the need for 'daily fellowship with God'.

When did people begin to turn away from religion?

According to the answers received from the farm-workers, they began to turn away from religion especially during the period of mass-collectivisation. The new Soviet order soon leads to the decay of religious ideas and customs, such as the use of the religious agrarian calendar, the holding of processions to pray for rain, etc. It would not occur to any Kolchose-worker today (not even to one who was still a Christian) to observe these religious custom on a collective-farm (Kolchese).

Religion too is subject to the material laws of Marxism. But despite the revolutionary changes, religious ideas still survive in the new Socialist order. But it would be a mistake to under-estimate the harm done by religious prejudice in the Soviet Socialist order. We must never forget the irrefutable fact that religion - however much it may try to adapt itself to the new conditions of socialist society, prevents people from fully exercising their creative faculties, makes them sceptical about the achievements of science, and opposes any change in the conditions of living.

Religion has not been eradicated

Although the influence of the church is weakening in the country districts, many religious concepts and customs are deeply imbedded in the minds of the people, and are regarded as an inherent part of their folk-tradition. This tradition is expressed in the presence of icons in people's homes, and in the observance of religious ceremonies such as baptism, marriage and church-festivals. But the different classes of the rural population differ in their attitude to these customs, which are closely connected with folk-tradition. This raises a very important question, and the success of our atheist work depends on finding the right answer to it: we have to find a different approach to each different class of Christian.

A different approach to different types of Christians

Atheist literature shows a misleading tendency to regard all Christians as a closed unity, without taking due account of the differences which exist between them (i.e. in their attitude to religion).

It is only the older generation (people over 60) who practise the Christian faith today with any consistency. These people grew up in pre-Revolutionary Russia when religion was still the dominant force in the patriarchal peasant-families. It is therefore difficult for many people of the older generation to liberate themselves from the ideas which have been instilled into them. However, there are quite a large number of atheists even among these older people, and every one of these atheists has had to face many complicated problems in life before ultimately deciding to give up his religion.

Religious belief still persists, however, because many people are incapable of answering the problems of science themselves, or of understanding the causes of certain natural phenomena. "When one thinks how the world was formed and how the animals and then man were created, then one thinks of God, the Creator", says "S", a woman-worker on a Kolchose, aged 59, in the village of Vladimirskoje, Gorki-Oblast.

A wise word by an atheist propagandist, with graphic descriptions of the real nature of natural phenomena, can often help people to grow out of the church-tradition. But atheists do not always employ the right kind of propaganda when talking with the older generation. It is a great mistake to think that it is not worth while paying much attention to them, because they will soon die. Religious traditions are still being transmitted from one generation to another. For instance, one woman-worker in a Kolchuse at Kalinin-Oblast named "B", who compelled her son to be married in church, writes: "Our children are in our hands. They have to do what we decide."

It is difficult to overcome the religious convictions of older people, because each case has to be treated individually. This is the only way of turning a doubting Christian into an atheist, or of planting the seed of doubt in the soul of a believer. The important thing is not only to destroy their faith in God, but (what is perhaps even more essential) to weaken their religious influence on the rising generation, thus extricating it from the web of religious tradition.

The younger generation of Kolchuse-workers (people between 40 and 55) do not possess even a fragmentary knowledge of religion. Nearly all the members of this middle generation were educated in Soviet schools. They welcomed anything new. They struggle for the new way of life (Byt). Many of them refused to be married in church or to have their children baptised. They removed the icons from their homes. The women too were carried along by this wave of culture, and are now helping to overcome religious superstition. The majority of the middle-aged men working on the Kolchuse are atheists.

Youth

Special attention should be paid to the young people on the collective farms. Those between 20 and 35 years of age have usually had a school education. They have grown up in the midst of a mass-reversion from religion. But this "birthright" atheism conceals a certain weakness. The young people have not all realised the damage done by the religious view of life. They are therefore not capable of being an active atheist force. Unfortunately this is not sufficiently realised by the Soviet authorities, and consequently the work of enlightenment among youth is frequently inadequate. Why? Because the educational work among youth is not actively enough carried through by the Soviet pedagogy which is waiting for a simple outburst of atheism.

Although atheist propaganda concentrates mainly upon middle-aged and older people, the reactionary character of religion should be made clear to the younger people who know something about physics, chemistry and biology, and their attention drawn to the harm done by religious superstition, and the superfluity of old customs and traditions.

The task consists not only in impregnating young people with the materialist view of life (very few people still believe in God!) but in making the young workers on the Kolchuse into uncompromising opponents of religion.

Children

The problem of religious influence on children deserves the most serious attention. This influence is due to the fact that in many of the Kolchuse education for children is not sufficiently well organised, so that the parents are forced to leave their children in the care of their grandmothers. Children are sprinkled with holy water and taught to regard the icons as "little gods". Their parents secretly teach their prayers, they wear little crosses round their necks, are dragged to church services, and told religious myths.

When children go to school the influence of religion usually disappears. The child forgets what it learned in the family. But in order to ensure success in this sphere, the teacher must know his pupils personally and understand their family background. Atheist education in school does not consist merely in giving atheist talks. Every single lesson must be used as a weapon to destroy the religious view of life.

Experience shows that the most obstinate survivals of religion are those which are bound up with the traditional customs and folk-life, and which have accompanied the most important events in life from time immemorial.

One of these customs is the practice of having icons. Very often they have lost the prestige which they formerly possessed; they are no longer a fetish - even the older generation now regard them with indifference. One hears people say, "What's an icon, after all? Only an ordinary bit of wood". (this remark came from an 85-year-old member of a Kolchose named "A" from the village of Vladimirske, Gorki-Oblast), or "An icon is only a reminder not to forget our faith."

But although icons have lost their religious significance, they retain their place in the home as "a symbol of family life".

Icons are found in the homes of people who have discarded all their other religious prejudices; they retain them as souvenirs of their parents, or as a habitual ornament in the living-room. All the same, it would be a mistake to regard icons as a harmless survival of the past. It is the task of atheist propaganda to explain that icons are superfluous and harmful. But this must be done very tactfully. It is no use simply insisting that the icons be removed. They will not disappear from the wall until people have realised the falsehood ('Loshnost') of religious ideas.

Christening Children

One of the religious customs which survive most obstinately is the christening ceremony, which is one of the most important Christian sacraments. During the 1920's and 1930's this custom fell off in the country districts. But since the war of defence, the custom has been revived to a certain extent. So many of the children born during and since the war have been baptised (say the replies to the questionnaire). An exception to this are the families of the intelligentsia, the active promoters of socialism, and the progressive-minded workers on the Kolchose ... It is not only the children of Christian parents who are christened, but also the children of people who have never been baptised themselves and who have no idea about religion at all.

It is mainly the pious members of the older generation who stir up agitation in the family, insisting on the child being christened, because otherwise if it died it would not pass into eternal life. If they fail to convince the young mother, the old women sometimes refuse to bother about the baby. This threat is often extremely effective in villages where there is no day-nursery, and the working mothers do not know where to leave their children during the daytime.

But it is not only faith, superstition or outside pressure which induces the Kolchose-workers to christen their children. Many of them are attracted by the beauty of the ceremony. And apart from its religious significance, the young people too are attracted by it. Whatever the motive which leads people to adopt this religious ceremony, it is "an act whereby the child becomes a member of the Christian Church" and "the accomplishment of this act is an expression of an ideology which is entirely strange to us." In order to hasten the disappearance of this obsolete tradition, we must persuade people to adopt the new "name-giving" ceremonies.

Church Weddings

After the October Revolution the tradition of getting married in church fell off, in the same way as christening. But in some places it has recently again become "the fashion" to get married in church. However, this is far from being the universal practice. The ordinary wedding-eve celebrations do not bring out the full significance of the occasion, so people constantly revert to the traditional wedding-ceremony in church.

In connection with the wedding-celebrations, however, other religious customs are observed: pilgrimages, the bestowal of the parents' blessing, the kissing of icons, etc. All these customs are old traditions, but people forget that they are of Christian origin. They are sometimes observed even by the most progressive of the Kolchose-workers.

Only last summer (1959) "R", the secretary of the Komsomol (the Communist youth organisation) kissed the icons and made the sign of the cross at her wedding. She wanted to be married "in accordance with the old custom". She thought the religious ceremony was a generally-recognised formality, but unintentionally she thereby set a bad example to others.

Alternative Wedding Ceremonies

In order to do away with church weddings, it is not enough to educate young people in the spirit of atheism. We must try to find new wedding-ceremonies which correspond to the socialist way of life. One experiment of this kind is the Komsomol-Wedding, which is found both in the towns and in the country districts. (For instance, a civic wedding in very good taste was arranged in Leningrad in the reception-rooms of a beautiful house which had formerly been a small palace.)

Funerals

The same thing applies to funerals. Although many people have ceased to believe in a life beyond the grave, religious funerals are still very common. They are often preferred to secular funerals. The secular funeral is often not considered sufficiently colourful and ceremonious, especially in the country districts. This is why people constantly revert to the old traditional religious form of funeral.

Church Festivals

The number of days observed as church festivals is very much less than formerly, and they are much less ceremonious than they used to be. Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and the other great festivals in the church-calendar are celebrated mainly in the home, if there are any old members of the family. It is usually only the outward form of the festival which is observed: the special dishes, the colouring of Easter eggs, the decoration of the house with green branches at Whitsuntide. The Christian workers on the Kolchose no longer consider it a sin to work on church festival-days; but the housework is usually postponed until the next day.

In the Kolchose the church festivals are celebrated rather as traditional village festivals; it is only the very old people who realise their religious origin ... All the people from the neighbourhood stream into the villages on these occasions, which end in everyone getting drunk. It is on these days that there are the most offences against public order, and the most crimes. Sometimes these festivals last two or three days, even during the hottest harvest-

weather, thus holding up the production of the Kolchose and wasting everyone's wages. Quite often the Kolchose Committee decides not to observe these summer festivals of the church. But when the date arrives people take a holiday all the same, because they have not received any explanation to enlighten them beforehand. Even the new Soviet festivals, such as the Harvest Festival, are regarded by the members of the Kolchose as the same old church festivals celebrated on a different date.

General Conclusions

A successful struggle against religious survivals in the present stage of development of our society is closely connected with improving the ideological and cultural standards of Soviet people. There are still not enough libraries, clubs, cultural institutions, "Red Groups", etc. in the villages to meet the needs of the people. There is a great lack of initiative in this respect.

Anti-religious talks are given by people who no longer believe in God. But the anti-religious propaganda (Ateistitcheskoe Slovo) does not penetrate to the Christian families, which form the cells of society. People must be persuaded individually, bearing in mind the changes which are taking place in the mentality of the Kolchose-worker from one generation to another.

Our scientific atheist propaganda has a tremendous field of material at its disposal for propaganda purposes. The exploitation of nuclear energy, the conquest of cosmic space, the production of new artificial materials - all this provides inexhaustible material for exposing the anti-scientific outlook of religion, and thus proving the tremendous superiority of atheist-materialist science.

The campaign against religious survivals must take the offensive. Every individual Communist has a duty to be a militant atheist. The party organisations are the centres from which atheist propaganda is carried out.

Extract from "Nauka i Religia", No 5, 1960

At the fifth session of the Supreme Soviet, which met in Moscow at the beginning of May, President Khrushchev reported on all the questions relating to publicity in the USSR.

In the fifth number of "Nauka i Religia" (Science and Religion, May 1960), a publication for the propagation of atheism, attention is drawn to the fact that Khrushchev deplores the amorality of the political and military leaders in the warmongering bourgeois nations. "One is obliged to ask oneself what moral standards these people have. They claim to be Christians and dare to accuse us of being atheists! A fine sort of morality these people have! If they really believed in God, they would at least be afraid of hell; for they will certainly go there as a punishment for their sins against peace and humanity, and will burn in hell fire for all eternity, according to Christian teaching ..." "But our country sincerely desires peace and the peaceful settlement of all disputes."

The next article in "Nauka i Religia" entitled "Spring Celebrations" describes Chancellor Adenauer and Bishop Otto Dibelius as strong advocates of nuclear warfare (atom-men). The article says: "The second atom-man (in the Federal German Republic) is Bishop Dibelius. This disciple of Christ, filled with Christian love, has even gone so far as to glorify the atom-bomb. He has described the atom-bomb as a means of saving the masses. Just imagine! From the Christian standpoint (the Bishop cynically remarks) the use of the hydrogen-bomb is not so terrible 'because we are all striving for eternal life'. For instance if a hydrogen-bomb annihilates a million people all at once, those people will attain eternal life all the sooner."

"It is hard to imagine anything horrider than this Bishop. However, Christians will hardly be prepared to share the fate which their dear Bishop suggests."

"It would be a mistake to think that all church-people are exactly like Adenauer and Dibelius."

"No, the overwhelming majority of Christians are absolutely correct in their conduct. They take part actively in the struggle for peace, and they decry the warmongers. Many of the clergy take the same attitude; perhaps that is why some of them are persecuted ..."

"It is quite clear that the problem of peace can never be solved by religion or the church. But it will be solved in another way.

"On the 1st of May all over the world people are extolling the USSR as the main bulwark of peace and freedom, as the decisive factor in stabilising international affairs, and as a guarantee of national liberty and independence ..."

"It is therefore quite clear why the adherents of the old, dying world are filled with terror and despair. Their ruling classes are trying to face the onslaught of new forces. They are striving by every possible means to prevent the masses from participating in the struggle for peace, to curb democracy and socialism, to control the class-struggle, and to establish peace between the workers and the capitalists. For this purpose they encourage religious ideology as a means of throwing dust in the eyes of the workers. This explains the efforts of the Vatican to control the celebration of the 1st May (for its own purposes).

"But all that is destined to disappear. Today the workers can no longer be restrained from the class struggle, from growing sympathy for communism, and from the struggle for peace.

"The workers - both Christian and non-Christian - know where to find satisfaction for their common interests.

"The celebrations of May 1st clearly show the solidarity which exists between the masses in all countries in their struggle against the world of yesterday and its dastardly accompaniment - war".

In the campaign for peace, democracy and socialism "the revolutionary consciousness of the masses is growing maturer and firmer, and the masses are acquiring a true view of life, and a right understanding of man's task ..."

"Religious prejudice and superstition is being overcome step by step. Little by little the ideas of atheism are gaining ground. People are becoming more and more convinced that war is not an inevitable fate, predestined by God, but that it can and must be averted."

The 1st of May, the anniversary of the Revolution, "is the international Festival of Spring, the day on which we celebrate the invincible strength of man in his struggle for his real happiness, and not for his supposed happiness." The 1st of May is "the Festival of Labour, not the festival of an invalid hope in a God."

Another article in "Nauka i Religia" is called "Mathematics oppose religious Prejudices". A section on "the end of the World" says: "Even today Christians still believe in the myth of the imminent end of the world, and the idea is propagated by the Tserkovniki (church-people) and by the leaders of the different sects. Even today there are prophets who proclaim the Last Judgment. In order to make people fear God, the Tserkovniki spread the rumour that the world is heading for a catastrophe."

In actual fact learned mathematicians have proved "that the planets will go on circling in the same orbits for millions of years to come, and that no catastrophe of any kind threatens the solar system."

There is no foundation either for the idea that a catastrophe might be caused by the earth's colliding with a comet or with a star. "The astronomers have made careful calculations which prove that a comet because of its consistence could not have the slightest effect on the earth.

As for the possibility of a collision between the earth and the sun, the scientists have proved that "such a contingency is so extremely improbable that it is not worth considering at all."

The theologians (and the scientists who have been influenced by religion) maintain that the time is not far off when the sun will have used up all its energy, and will cease to warm the earth. Then the theologians (and the scientists under religious influence) say that the end of the world, prophesied in the Bible, will come ...

But the calculations of the astronomers prove that the sun has such enormous supplies of energy that "the amount of heat which it radiates will in all probability remain constant for milliards of years."

"God and the Devil". This is the title of another article in "Nauka i Religia" (No 5, 1960). It has the following sub-headings:

"The Devil as the reverse aspect of God"
"Why does God need a defender?"
"Lead us not into temptation"
"The struggle in the heavenly spheres".

(a) The Devil as the reverse aspect of God

"The whole of Christendom - the Orthodox, Old Catholic, Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, the Baptist-Evangelical Christians and all the other sects - worship the divine power to which they ascribe the creation of the world and of man and which (in their view) is the source of all power and glory. They believe that God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent. God's attitude to man is gracious, just and loving ..."

"But there is a supernatural force in the world which is hostile to God, and which is called the Devil" ... "Christians are convinced that the Devil is almighty; nearly as omnipotent as God. Like God he is omniscient and omnipresent"....

"The Devil's attitude to man is hostile, malicious;" he does everything he can to destroy man. "His influence on human life is almost as great as that of so-called divine providence" ... "The Devil is not mentioned in the creed of the Christian faith. But the Christian has to believe in the Devil, just as he has to believe in God." According to the Bible, the mythical founder of the Christian religion, Jesus Christ, left his disciples a prayer which contains the request, "Deliver us from the Evil One ..."

Who is this Evil One?

"He has many different names. He is usually called 'The Prince of Darkness, Satan, the Demon, Beelzebub.'

"When and why did God create the Devil? And why did the Creator surrender His finest creation (man) to the power of the Devil, almost as soon as man's life on earth began?"...

"The atheist will merely smile in reply to these questions. He knows there is no Devil and no God, and that the supernatural powers are inventions of the human imagination. But for religious-minded people the position is more complicated. For them the question of the existence of God and the Devil is of crucial importance, for their whole attitude to life is determined by their faith" ...

But for atheists too this question has an importance which is not merely historical or philosophical. "For the 'Tserkovniki' maintain the myth about the existence of the Devil even today, in modern form. The forces of reaction in the world maintain this myth as one of the strongest weapons in their political struggle"...

The forces of reaction "camouflage their struggle for the maintenance of capitalism and colonialism, and their imperialistic anti-peace campaigns by maintaining that they are defending religion against 'seducers' and against the Devil himself ... In his report at the January session of the Supreme Soviet, Khrushchev warned us that 'the enemies of peace describe the peaceful coexistence between the nations as an invention of the Devil'"...

The theologians have written mountains of books about religious dogmas. But they deliberately shirk the question, how Christians are to understand the relationship between God and the Devil. They cannot even define clearly who Satan is. That is not by accident. The more deeply they examined the problem, the more they were convinced that it is impossible to prove the existence either of God or of Satan. Yet Christian doctrine is based on the idea of the eternal struggle between God and the Devil. According to the Bible, Christ came to earth in order to curb the power of the Devil ...

Thus the Christian God is inextricably connected with Satan. "In other words: the Devil is the reverse aspect of God."

(b) Why does God need a defender?

"No one has ever seen God, but no one has ever seen the Devil either. They both appear to man only in dreams or in mysterious visions, where no witness is present. But as soon as the man wakes up, the dream fades. A dream can hardly be proof of a truth."

A theological symposium entitled "Doctrines and Examples of the Christian Faith" contains the following confession: "People who deny the existence of the Devil and of evil spirits thereby deny the whole Christian faith, because they undermine its very foundation ..."

(c) How can one prove that the Devil exists?

The Catholic church-dignitaries in Rome maintain the Vatican College, whose task is to prove the existence of God. Catholic professors have been trying to do so for many years, but have not succeeded. "If the Catholics, and with them also the Orthodox theologians, want to be logical they ought first to prove the existence of the Devil" ...

"One of the leading activists in the Russian Orthodox Church today, Professor Alexander Ossipov (see p. 9 of the present issue of "Current Developments in the Eastern European Churches"), has renounced his faith and become an atheist after many years as a professor at the Theological Academy in Leningrad.

Ossipov had reached the conclusion that Satan is not an enemy of God, but at best God's 'deputy' who undertakes difficult, punishable cases in human life."

The conclusion reached by Ossipov "is based on the corresponding passages in the Bible."

As everyone knows, the Devil is the Lord of Hell, where God sends the souls of sinners for punishment. "Satan therefore fulfils the will of God and tortures sinners. If God commands him to do so, Satan releases a sinner and he enters eternal life." It is therefore not difficult to see that Satan is acting under God's instructions (says Ossipov). "Satan is constantly at work among men, tempting them to sin, and then they are punished by God." Consequently "Satan is not only the Lord of Hell (created by God) and its Chief Executioner; he is also God's 'agent provocateur' among mankind."

The theologians and preachers who defend 'Holy Scripture' contradict this view. They say, God does not give instructions to Satan. But that God permits the Devil to lead men into temptation, and that then it is their own responsibility whether they fall into temptation or not... .

"No theologian, however, has ever given a clear and convincing answer to the question which every Christian is bound to face:

Why does God permit the Prince of Darkness to bring evil and death on earth? Why does God allow the Devil to destroy His creation? Either He wants it, or He is powerless to prevent it. So why all this talk about God's omnipotence and mercy?

(d) And lead us not into temptation

"If Christians had ever really reflected about what they believe, they would have stopped believing it long ago. If they had ever analysed the words of the prayers they said in childhood they would have been amazed at the stupid and absurd ideas they contained."

When Christians say the Lord's Prayer they ask God not to lead them into temptation, but to deliver them from evil. And they imagine that Jesus Christ himself taught them this prayer.

What does it mean, "Lead us not into temptation"? It means, "Dear God, don't lay any pitfalls for us, don't create any temptations which might lead us to sin" ... "God has therefore given this prayer to man for all time, and has thus shown that He will always lead people into temptation and will not deliver them from evil" ...

"If God wanted to get rid of Satan, he could have done so without the prayers of Christians. For nearly 2,000 years Christians have gone on repeating the Lord's Prayer. But their request, not to be led into temptation, but to be delivered from evil, has not yet been answered."

As soon as man had been created, God permitted the Devil to tempt Adam and Eve in Paradise, and to lead them astray.

By planting the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Paradise, and forbidding them to eat of its fruit, God prepared for his first act of temptation. "Since he is omniscient, he knew perfectly well that man, in his ignorance and inexperience, would not resist this temptation, and that he would then receive punishment."

But that is what God did. "He wanted man to be ultimately destroyed through the united efforts of himself and the Devil."

In the story of Job also "God works hand in glove with the Devil ..." "The God depicted in Holy Scripture is no use at all. The theologians try to water down the meaning of the Book of Job, which reveals the cunning perfidy not only of the Devil but also of God. The theologians say, the story of the sufferings of Job should not be taken literally, but allegorically ... as if the sufferings of Job foreshadowed the sufferings of Jesus."

But who believes that?

There are other examples in the Bible of the way in which God gives commissions to the spirits of evil (e.g. in the Second Book of Chronicles - Paralipomenon) ... Christians ought to know that according to the Bible God Himself gives instructions to the powers of evil (e.g. the story of David and Saul, where God tells the Devil to enter into Saul).

But the silliest and most amazing story, which shows how God and the Devil cooperate to tempt man, is the story in the Gospels of Jesus Christ's temptation in the wilderness. The authors of this story wanted to show "that no man can escape temptation, not even the Son of God." But this story also proves "that God the Father does not even trust his own Son."

To extricate themselves from this awkward dilemma, the theologians depict the encounter of the God/man with Satan as a means of convincing the Devil. What is the result?

The Bible itself gives the answer:

"Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the Devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward a-hungered. And when the tempter came to him, he said, 'If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.'

But he answered and said, 'It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.'

The Gospel of Matthew goes on to say:

"Then the Devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, and saith unto him, 'If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give His angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

But Jesus would have nothing to do with such an experiment.

Then the Devil took him up a very high mountain and showed him all the Kingdoms of the world, and said,

"All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me'. Then saith Jesus unto him, 'Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.'"

These passages from Matthew's Gospel show that God has placed all the kingdoms of this world under the control of the Devil, and that Jesus did not intend to conquer Satan and take his kingdom away from him. Jesus merely refused to worship Satan ... at which God the Father was very pleased.

(e) The struggle in the heavenly spheres

"If one reads what the Bible says about the struggle between supernatural powers in the heavenly spheres, one asks oneself what theological purpose is served by this myth of the continuous struggle between God and the Devil." Its purpose is as follows:

"If Satan did not exist, then everything evil in human life would have to be ascribed to God. But then one could not represent God as merciful and omnipotent. The Bible is full of contradictions. The teaching about Satan is a glaring example of this."

The "Book of Revelation" says:

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the Devil, An' Sathan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him ... And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, 'Rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Voe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath.'"

Incredible as it may sound, the Christian theologians have turned this myth into one of their basic dogmas. For instance the Apostle Paul says:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the Devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

According to modern theologians, the Devil may assume any disguise: he may appear as an angel of light, or as Jesus Christ himself. Extraordinary as it may seem, God does nothing to prevent him. A Baptist publication states that the Devil is the cleverest of all artists and the most learned.

Sound theologians of the Orthodox Church regard the Devil in the way described in John's "Revelation". For instance, in one of his recent sermons the Metropolitan of Krutitsi and Kolomna, Nikolai, explained that every individual Christian recognises the angels of light and the angels of darkness, which have fallen away from God.

(f) The struggle in the heavenly sphere is now explained by theologians as follows:

"Satan, who was once the strongest of the angels and the next to God, rebelled against God, because he wanted to be equal to Him." ...

"Instead of destroying His adversary, God cast him down upon the earth. It is therefore understandable if Christians ask questions such as: 'If the Devil repents of his sin against God, will he be reinstated as an angel of light? Could the Devil do that?' The theologians have found an answer for this question too ... as is clearly shown in the following story:

The Devil appeared in human form to Saint Anthony, and asked the Saint to ask God whether He would accept the repentance of the Devil. Saint Anthony begged God for an answer - whether He could forgive the Devil or not. Suddenly the angel of the Lord appeared to Saint Anthony like a streak of light and said, 'Why do you pray to God for the Devil who led you into temptation yourself?' Saint Anthony replies in all candour, that he did not know that. The angel then explains to Saint Anthony the conditions under which God would be prepared to accept the repentance of the Devil.

The Devil was to stay for three years in one place, without leaving it. He was to turn a hundred times to the East every day and say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me, the Evil one'. Then he was to turn a hundred times to the West and say, 'Lord, have mercy upon me and save me, the darkened light of the divine'.

If the Devil fulfilled these conditions seriously, he would be reinstated among the angels of God."

"Just imagine", writes "Nauka i Religia", "what would have happened if the Devil had accepted God's conditions! God would then have lost this irreplaceable deputy whose task is to tempt and torment man. It is true, men would have breathed a sigh of relief, but then they would no longer have needed to pray to God, and there would have been no further need for the Christian Church."

It is clear that the following day Saint Anthony realised what the Tserkovniki required. For when he brought God's answer to the Devil, the latter laughed and said: "If I had wanted to describe myself as the divine light, I would have done so from the beginning and saved myself, but not now. For now I have become famous. Everyone serves me. Everyone fears me. Everyone trembles before me."

So no agreement will ever be reached between God and the Devil. There is no prospect of harmony in the heavenly spheres. But if the great powers are at war with one another, man's hair is bound to stand on end.

Questions from Readers sent to the Editor of "Nauka i Religia"
(No 5, 1960)

Question: "Is it permissible to preach in Church?"

Answer: "Soviet legislation does not prohibit the preaching of sermons in churches, mosques, etc. But these sermons must be purely religious in character. The pulpit must not be used for political pronouncements, nor for any other purpose apart from religion, or which is contrary to the interests of the Soviet State.

The law permitting preaching, however, is often infringed by the clergy and by preachers. Instead of restricting themselves to expounding religious questions, they touch on all sorts of political themes and on questions concerned with the education of young people. In many cases events in national or international affairs are distorted and misrepresented. Some preachers who are anxious to stir up religious fanaticism instil fear into the believers by representing a new war as unavoidable; at the same time they grossly distort the reasons which lead to war, and refuse to recognise the rights of the nations which are fighting for peace. The pulpits and the prayer-chapels of the sects often spread all sorts of information about the lives of the Soviet people and the ethics of the future Communist social order. Sermons of this kind are legally prohibited."

Question: What churches and sects are permitted in the USSR?

Answer: "The following are permitted: the Russian Orthodox Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church, the Church of the Old Believers, the Roman Catholic Church, the Armenian-Gregorian Church, the Mohammedan faith, the Buddhist faith, the Jewish faith, the Baptist -Evangelical Christians and Seventh-Day Adventists and some others.

Some readers insist categorically that all these sects should be prohibited immediately. Is this right? It certainly is not right, for it is contrary to the principle of freedom of conscience which is consistently applied in the USSR.

With regard to the sects, a distinction must be drawn between those which are legally permitted, and those which are prohibited in the USSR owing to their fanaticism and their hostility to the state.

Instead of drawing the distinction in this way, which is the only right distinction from the standpoint of the Soviet state's attitude to the religious activities of the different sects, many people make the mistake of distinguishing between the sects according to their outward characteristics, dividing them into: sects which are registered with the competent state authorities, and sects which are not registered. The latter included groups whose activities do not differ in the slightest from those of registered groups. This leads to confusion and tends to eliminate the difference between sects which are authorised to worship freely, and sects which are fanatical and hostile to the state.

People sometimes ask, which religion or which church is the most harmful one, on which atheist propaganda should concentrate specially. The question should not be worded in this way. All religion, and all churches or sects are prejudicial to the cause of Communist progress. The ideological struggle must therefore be directed against religion itself."

Question: "The clergy sometimes forbid believers to go to the cinema, or to attend schools or clubs, to listen to the wireless, or to take part in social organisations. Is this admissible in Soviet society?"

Answer: "Some clergy have indeed prevented believers from attending cultural activities, or taking part in the work of public organisations. This applies especially to the sects, because, as they say religion must occupy the first place in people's thoughts, their emotions and their actions.' They therefore do their utmost to persuade their members not to play any part in 'secular life'. Prohibiting people from going to the theatre or the cinema (even if the penalty is only imposed by the church) amounts to restricting the civic rights of the individual, which is contrary to the Soviet Constitution. It is not permissible for anyone to prevent a citizen from taking active part in the work of public Soviet associations. Any attempt on the part of the clergy ... to draw the believers away from active participation in civic, cultural and social-political life is an infringement of the basic law concerning the separation of Church and State."

Question: "Should religious associations start orchestras, choirs and other groups for artistic activities, organise concerts and excursions, social evenings or youth groups, and arrange special activities for children, young people and women? Does not the prohibition of such projects amount to an infringement of the Soviet legislation concerning freedom of worship?"

Answer: "It is illegal for the religious groups or their clergy to organise activities of this kind. The clergy of all religions fully realise that the Church will die out unless it succeeds in getting a hold over the souls of the rising generation. They therefore resort to every conceivable method of strengthening their influence over young people, so as to give a fresh impetus to the dying religious interest of the people. For this purpose some priests visits the believers in their homes and give talks there to groups of children and young people ...

The clergy also preach special sermons for children in the churches and mosques. They make the parents take their children to church for this purpose. They even arrange a special service for school-children at the beginning of the school term. Those who are keenest in this respect are the sects.

Soviet legislation prohibits religious groups from undertaking special work among young people, organising youth services, or forming youth-groups with religious instruction. The churches have not the right ... to arrange any activities apart from pure religious worship.

The clergy, heads of sects, etc. must not exercise any other functions apart from that of worship. They must not undertake any tasks which are the prerogative of the civic and social organs in the USSR.

There have been cases where parents have forced their children to attend church (under the influence of the clergy), and have punished the children if they refused to carry out religious customs. Not only have the clergy failed to condemn such cruelty; they have even encouraged it. For instance children have been threatened with punishment by the church ... if they participate in the public functions of their schools, if they sing Soviet songs, or are members of the pioneer organisation or of the Komsomol. Some of the clergy refuse spiritual care to parents who do not bring their children to church ... These things must not be tolerated. For Soviet law prohibits the use of compulsion or the punishment of believers.

As the church is not allowed to organise special activities for women (although it sometimes does so), the civic authorities must pay special attention to atheist propaganda among religious women. These women are usually housewives who are cut off from public life in the USSR. 80% of all the members of sects are women. Most of them never read any anti-religious literature at all ... But very little is yet being done to influence these women individually through atheist propaganda."

Question: "Why is the church not allowed to undertake charity?"

Answer: "People who are not familiar with the Soviet legislation about religious matters think there is no harm done if the church helps people by giving them money - for instance children or young engaged couples. They think these 'good works' do no harm to anyone."

The Soviet Constitution and Soviet labour-law are based on the principles of the socialist social order: 'from each according to his capacity', 'to each according to his output', and 'if someone will not work, neither shall he eat.'

The morality of our society, which has eliminated poverty, hunger and unemployment, and in which the material welfare of our people is constantly improving, is an expression of the essential interests of all the workers, both Christian and non-Christian. This social ethic therefore condemns all who refuse to work - idlers, beggars, etc. Soviet citizens do not need the charity of the church. In the USSR conditions have been created in which a revival of charity - that shameful survival of an exploiting society - has become superfluous, in any form whatsoever. The time is past when the ruling classes in society could throw an occasional sop, a few crumbs of charity, to the wretched masses to keep them quiet ... The workers in the USSR have their social insurance. If necessary they are helped by the state, the trade-unions and other organisations ... Charity from the church has therefore become completely unnecessary for Soviet people; they will only be humiliated if the church condescends to give them a few pence out of its enormous income. Charity has nothing to do with religion. It is therefore illegal. Furthermore, it is contrary to the teaching of the church.

If the church pretends to be the defender of Soviet people, it cannot prove that it is sincere. According to the teaching of the church, the purpose of human life is not earthly life (with all that it has to offer) but the life beyond the grave, the life in heaven ... According to the teaching of the church, therefore, the humble acceptance of everything that makes man unhappy on earth is a guarantee of bliss in the future life. Earthly happiness is therefore an obstacle to the attainment of bliss hereafter. So why should the church be concerned about people and their happiness?

It is quite clear that religious teaching is harmful to people, that it detracts from their human dignity, destroys their faith in their own power, and weakens their will and their determination in the struggle for earthly happiness.

Under the camouflage of charity the church conceals its desire to increase its own authority and strengthen its influence among the people. That is why the 'good works' done by the Tserkovniki are not really good. They are only a form of propaganda for the church. The church is therefore not allowed to collect money for charitable purposes. It is free to use any money at its disposal for the satisfaction of religious requirements."

Women an' Religion

"Nauka i Religia", the monthly atheist popular science magazine (Moscow No 3, 1960) devotes a ten-page article to the problem "Women and Religious Belief".

"Woman was the first victim of slavery".

This introductory phrase forms the basis of "Nauka i Religia"'s arguments on the above subject. It stresses the fact that in the course of the centuries "little, very little, has been done to liberate women".

"It is not a golden page in the history of mankind!" On the contrary, the view that woman is a second-rate creature has become increasingly strong.

"An especially consistent and malicious enemy of woman has been religion."

It is true, it was not the priests who conceived of women as being inferior. This conception has arisen from the social living conditions of the class-society during the course of history. But the church then turned prejudice into an unchanging "divine truth" and made believe that it had existed from the beginning of time.

The Bible, the Koran the Talmud and all the other sacred religious books describe woman as being "subject to man". Woman is a creature incapable of fulfilling any public function.

"We need not to enumerate all the insulting expressions with which the knights of religious obscurantism have treated women. They calumniated marriage, they praised sterile virginity, they considered woman to be an instrument of the devil for the sole purpose of destroying honest souls."

"Woman, thou art the gate to Hell," wrote Tertullian. It is better to "remain unmarried, even if that leads to the decline of the human race" ...

"Marriage is wicked and unclean, it is a means of lust", declared Origin who castrated himself in a fit of religious mania.

And they were no common Christians but fathers of the church whose teaching is still preached today.

The theologians now maintain that religion has nothing to do with the crime committed against woman in earlier days. On the contrary, they point to the "valuable contribution the church has made towards the solution of the problem of women". They maintain that Christianity has given to woman the exalted position due to her and had freed her from degrading pagan prejudices.

Such declarations, when multiplied, distort historical truth ... though it is true that "millions of women have taken their unwept tears to the church."

The guardians of religion today talk a lot about the permanence of church marriage. They say that the faith is like a cement that binds the foundations of family life together.

But what about church marriage? Weren't young girls married again and again against their will whereas in reality they only took part in their own "funeral service". The church married all that were entrusted to its care ... and who paid for the ceremony. Then these marriages were called binding. The unhappy victims had to drink the cup of suffering right to the end.

The Tserkovniki (church people) talk about the permanence of church marriage. What they meant in reality was the permanence of chains to which woman was bound without any regard for her feelings.

Now how did the church react to the struggle for the emancipation of women? The pre-revolutionary literature of the church states: "Christianity will be wise to bar women from any kind of public activity."

Or: "Woman was not created as an independent creature. She is therefore unable to carry out a public function in society or in the service of the State."

Even before the revolution progressive thinkers, men and women, fought for the equality of women ... and laid the foundation for the equality of men and women today.

"Humanity has always dreamed of a social order freed of all class domination which would guarantee to women equal rights with men. The great Socialist Revolution in 1917 has now laid the foundation for this new social order."

The progress and freedom of a social order essentially depends on how freely a woman can move in it. In this sense we are fully justified in saying that the freedom and the equality of the Soviet woman is the greatest achievement of the most progressive Socialist order in the world. Here the Soviet woman is equal to the Soviet man in all public offices. "There is no longer a women's problem as such in Soviet Russia."

Women in the USSR represent 53% of the specialists with a maximum training. About 3 million women work in scientific institutes, cultural and educational centres of all kinds.

Soviet women have made a great contribution to the uplift of the Communist society. An example of this is Valentina Gaganova, who volunteered to be transferred from one of the most progressive work brigades to an unproductive one and who succeeded to make it one of the leading brigades in the country. Her contribution is a living expression of the Communist attitude towards work.

The Soviet woman does not need to worry about the future. She doesn't worry about the future of her children. "Our nation, the Soviet state, surrounds future mothers with respect and honour and general care." She has the main part in the education of the children, in the formation of their conscience and their moral outlook.

But the century-old false habit of looking down on women has not quite been overcome in the Soviet Union. There are still occasional signs of it. Experience shows that religion still has the greatest influence on women today, who constitute 80 to 90% of the believers.

To be sure today religious leaders very often declare that they recognize the equality of women. But the scornful attitude towards women who are imagined to be inferior human beings still subsists in all religions. This behaviour towards women is yet firmly implanted in the religious services of the Orthodox Church, in the worship of the Jews, in the religious prescriptions of Islam, etc. even at the present day.

This attitude of religion towards women detracts from their value as persons, paralyses their will and their creative abilities. "By tying women to the limited circle of household duties, family and husband, and by inculcating in her the idea that prayer is necessary to save her soul (in preparation for a life hereafter), the church isolates woman from the community and estranges her from the wide, interesting life of Socialist society.

Religious morality again and again hinders the creation of a sound family life. It tries to destroy the happiness of lovers "by representing marriage between believers and non-believers, or between people of different confessions, as immoral".

In some of the republics in the Middle East and the Caucasus, and in other parts of the USSR where Islam was formerly predominant, there are still vestiges of the feudal prejudices towards women (the veil, the bride-price, etc.). The greatest possible attention must therefore be given to the moral education of women in the Soviet Union. The unrelenting progress of scientific achievements, of scientific atheism and the criticism of religious ideologies will help to free women from the influence of religion.

/ Our Happiness is Here on Earth

Valentina Gaganova is a specially outstanding girl in one of the leading work-brigades in Soviet Russia. She volunteered to work with a brigade that had not fulfilled its quota so as to encourage members of the brigade to their maximum output. "Nauka i Religia" (No 3, 1960) has published an article written by Valentina on the above subject.

"In the evening my colleagues and I often sit down together to read the incoming mail. There is always a lot of it: thousands of letters posted from every town in the Soviet Union arrive in our venerable spot called Vyshny Volochnok ...

Friends and strangers send us their wishes, offer advice or ask for help. All of them are interested in our work. From the many different letters we receive I should like to pick out just one. I am asked to say why I joined a relatively unproductive work-brigade. The letter ends with the fervent wish 'May God help you ...'"

Valentina Gaganova then describes her life. At 12 she had to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. Her father had been killed in the war in 1942 and her mother was head of the household. There was no question of Valentina's going to school.

"But even when things were really bad, we never waited for a non-existent God to come and help us. We knew that we had to work out our own solution."

Then there were long years of apprenticeship in a cotton mill, "until I became very good at this kind of work ... and was made forewoman of a highly productive work-brigade."

"It wasn't God's providence, nor His impenetrable will that guided me to my present position. Can one ever hope to accomplish anything in life by relying on a religion that teaches us we are sad 'strangers' on earth?" ...

"No, we are Soviet citizens and free masters of our own planet, and we have enough to do in our earthly home without worrying about a heavenly one" ...

"The religious fanatics will hardly understand that it wasn't the wish for higher wages but a real interest in our great cause that made me slave away in an unproductive work-team. None of us thinks of his own 'salvation' - we all follow the principle: 'Each for all, all for each'."

That is why I, a simple manual worker, have been awarded the honourable title 'Heroine of Socialist Work'. At the ceremony in the Kremlin where I received the medal, K.E. Voroshilov said to me: 'Valia, there are many heroes in the Soviet Union, but you are doing a good job too'.

Yes, there are many heroes in the Soviet Union, and there have been quite a number of women among them lately. ... What do the protagonists of religion have to say to that, they who 'look on women as the basest creatures, as slaves of their husbands, as a sort of domestic animal?'

Today "man and woman cooperate as equals to construct a great, happy life." Therefore let's say to all those who still believe in religious fairy tales: "What has your God given you - but a crippled life?" ... To the correspondent who wished me 'May God help you' and to all those women who still believe in God, I would say: "Stop waiting for a non-existent bliss in heaven. Let us cooperate with our national heroes in creating happiness here on earth."

Why is there no atheist literature for young people?

This is the opening sentence in a letter sent by a schoolboy in Leningrad to the editors of "Nauka i Religia" (Science and Religion), the atheist monthly published in Moscow, and reproduced in its fifth number(1960).

The boy's name is Gennady Gromov and he is in the ninth class at school. He writes, "I am 16 years of age. I have never yet believed in God. I read your paper regularly, and also the latest atheist publications. But I regret to say that the books written about atheism are boring and uninteresting. They are very vague on many points which one wants to understand too.

The thing is, my mother believes in God. I try to convince her that she is wrong, but so far I have not succeeded. When I tell her there is no God, and that there are no Saints, she refers to the Bible and to the explanations given by some of the clergy. And then I don't know what to answer. All I can do is to retreat.

Dear editors, it would be very nice if more interesting, readable books about atheism could be published for school children. They should explain in detail how life began on this earth, how the Bible was written, and what the different sects believe."

"Nauka i Religia" comments: "We entirely agree with our young reader. What do the Academy of Pedagogic Science in Russia and the 'Utshpedgis' and 'Detdis' (educational publishers) say about it?"

The light of the glorious dawn

E.I. Andreeva, a Socialist Labour-heroine who is a member of the Supreme Soviet and president of the 'Komintern' Kolchose (at Tambov-Oblast, Central Russia), writes as follows:

"My parents were farmers. When my father died, he left a wife and three children. It was not God, but the Communist Party, which helped my mother to give us children an education (first at school, then at the agricultural training-college). I then took a correspondence course to complete my training, after I had already become head of my Kolchose."

"No one is surprised at the fact that a simple, modest woman like myself has had a college education, and is now head of a big Kolchose and a member of the government ... In the USSR that is an everyday occurrence.

Not long ago the title of 'Socialist Labour-Heroine' was conferred upon me. This high honour is bestowed upon all the workers in our agricultural association who have honourably fulfilled their task. For instance, in 1959 we cultivated 100 hectares of pasture-land, and produced 171 hundredweight of meat and 350 hundredweight of milk, thus exceeding the production of the United States of America already after the first 12 months of the Seven-Year Plan."

In achieving such successes "Soviet women have a very big part to play. The women and girls have a great deal to do, if they remain on their Kolchose after finishing school" (i.e. if they do not go elsewhere).

"It is not the church with its promises of happiness in the next world, but the Soviet order of society, self-confidence, belief in one's own powers, which has opened the way to happiness for us working women and for the whole Soviet people."

I am proud of my country and my people

The following statement is from Tursuna Akhunova who also received the State medal as a "Heroine of Socialist Work" and is now directing the Kirov-Kolchose near Tashkent (Usbekistan).

"They say that the conscience of mankind changes only very slowly. I should not like to argue the point. But in the course of my 22 years of life I have constantly noted how quickly ideas sink into the past, ideas that have dominated millions of people for centuries. I have seen for myself how a feeling for new ideas has grown up in the people ...

"In Usbekistan this is especially obvious. In the course of the centuries Islam has poisoned the souls of the simple people. But the worst lot is reserved to Mohammedan women ...

"I was 15 when I decided to become a tractor-driver. 'White gold', i.e. cotton, is the great wealth of my sunny homeland. Already when we were school-children we helped with the harvesting on the Kolchose.

"In 1953, when new hands were recruited for the mechanics cours, I registered with the approval of most of the Kolchose members, including my mother. She said to me: 'Learn, my daughter, learn so that you will get the highest marks. We need good tractor-drivers.'

"And my grandmother said the same thing.

"Of course, there were other people who said: 'that is no work for women. No good Mohammedan woman will permit herself to walk about in men's clothes.'

"Are you set on becoming a tractor-driver?", my mother asked. Perhaps you've changed your mind, was my grandmother's comment. I didn't hold it against them as I was determined to carry out my plan ...

"The result was overwhelming. Not even 100 people could have picked as much cotton by hand before.

"I am young and I know about the former lawless life of Usbekian women only from hearsay. It affects me in a strange way to hear how my grandmother married a man she had never seen before ... I've married a man I love and have been able to introduce him a a radio-expert into the brigade I lead."

"Today", says Tursuna Akhunova, "there are not many people left who will say that machinery is not a woman's job and that she should on no account take off her veil."

"In 1957, when I met women in some of the Capitalist cities in Asia who were still wearing veils I was proud of my people and my country, where the oppression of women with the blessing of the church has been banished forever."

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